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Short-Circuiting Aesthetics: A Novel Theory about the Origins of Hitler and the Nazis

Michael Lackey
University of Minnesota Morris, lacke010@morris.umn.edu

The Modernist God State

A Literary Study of the Nazis' Christian Reich

Michael Lackey

CONTENTS

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PART ONE

Debunking the Secularization Hypothesis

1

Short-circuiting aesthetics: a novel theory about the origins of Hitler and the Nazis

More than the philosopher, the psychologist, the physicist, and the sociologist, the novelist can articulate the complex conditions of human living. This is not to say that the works of philosophers, psychologists, physicists, and sociologists lack significance or value. To the contrary, novelists rely upon the findings and insights of these intellectual professionals to craft a work of art that can signify the human and the world in all their horror, richness, and complexity. But it is only the novelist who has the capacity to bring the ideas of all of these disciplines (and others) together in order to formulate a comprehensive vision of life. Such is the argument of D. H. Lawrence, who claims in his essay, "Why the Novel Matters": "being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters

of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog."[1] While most discipline-specific studies examine and explicate one facet of existence, the "novel is the book of life,"[2] so if people want a full-bodied understanding of being-in-the-world, they must begin with a careful study of the novel, which is why Lawrence admonishes his reader: "Turn truly, honourably to the novel, and see wherein you are man alive, and wherein you are dead man in life."[3]

Hyperbolic as these assertions might seem, Lawrence was not the only person to make such grandiose claims on behalf of the novel. For twentieth-century writers in particular there was a growing sense that novelists have the capacity to illuminate human action and historical events in a way that no other professional intellectual could, and what distinguishes novelists is their ability to make coherent and systematic sense of character, as Virginia Woolf argues in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Prior to 1910, novelists, for the most part, "laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things," giving readers the material house that characrers inhabited with the hope that readers would "be able to deduce the human beings who live there."[4] In this essay, Woolf outlines the limitations of the Edwardian and Georgian novelists, who focus on superficial externals rather than essential internals in their construction of character, an idea that she developed in much more detail in her 1919 essay, "Modern Novels," which would eventually come to be known as "Modern Fiction." Put simply, pre-modernists made use of "simple tools and primitive materials," which is why their novels "have a strange air of simplicity"[5] about them. By contrast, modernists, given their obsession with and focus on "the dark places of psychology,"[6] have advanced the art of the novel

[1] Lawrence (1936), "Why the Novel Matters," in E. D. McDonald ed. *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*. New York: The Viking Press: 535.
[2] Lawrence (1936): 535.
[3] Lawrence (1936): 537.
[4] Woolf (1978), "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 112.
[5] Woolf (1984), "Modern Fiction," in *The Common Reader: First Series*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company: 146.
[6] Woolf (1984): 152.

considerably, enabling writers "to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain."[7]

Indeed, for many twentieth-century novelists, the "sole *raison d'être* of a novel is," as Milan Kundera claims, "to discover what only the novel can discover."[8] To illustrate the novel's unique power and function, Kundera contrasts its evolution with "philosophy and science," which "have forgotten about man's being."[9] Here Kundera is using the language of Martin Heidegger to make his point, but he ultimately faults the German philosopher, for "all the great existential themes Heidegger analyzes in *Being and Time* [...] had been unveiled, displayed, illuminated by four centuries of the novel."[10] If Kundera sounds frustrated with philosophy here, he is not alone. In "Why the Novel Matters," Lawrence curses the "damned philosophers," who "talk as if they suddenly went off in steam, and were then much more important than they are when they're in their shirts."[11] Equally critical depictions of philosophy can be found in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, which portrays "'philosophers'" as appealing "'to what is superficial and supererogatory—reason'"[12] and philosophy as a world-disfiguring machine that is arbitrarily "'bored through the universe'";[13] E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*, which treats philosophers as delusional ("'I think I'm a great philosopher, but then all philosophers think that, though they don't dare to say so'"[14]) buffoons ("But as a philosopher he really was a joy for ever, an inexhaustible buffoon"[15]); and Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, which traces the harrowing journey of a University of St Petersburg philosophy student, a journey that culminates with the death of philosophy: "The *appartement* of the Boulevard des Philosophes

[7] For an excellent discussion of the rise of psychology during the modernist period, see Martin Jay (1996), "Modernism and the Specter of Psychologism," *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 3, No. 2: 93–111. Woolf (1984): 151.
[8] Milan Kundera (1988), *The Art of the Novel*. Translated by Linda Asher. New York: Harper & Row: 5.
[9] Kundera (1988): 4–5.
[10] Kundera (1988): 5.
[11] Lawrence (1936): 534.
[12] Huxley (2001), *Crome Yellow*. Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press: 111.
[13] Huxley (2001): 118.
[14] Forster (1993), *The Longest Journey*. New York: Vintage International: 33.
[15] Forster (1993): 97.

presented the dreary signs of impending abandonment. It looked desolate and as if already empty."[16]

What frustrates so many twentieth-century novelists is their conviction that philosophy's theories of knowledge and instruments of analysis are obsolete, and yet, scholars continue to privilege philosophers and the philosophical method in their depiction of the intellectual, political, and cultural history of the West. It is precisely this privileging of the philosopher to which Kundera objects when he claims that the "eighteenth century is not only the century of Rousseau, of Voltaire, of Holbach; it is also (perhaps above all!) the age of Fielding, Sterne, Goethe, Laclos."[17] Note how Kundera suggests that novelists have made a contribution that surpasses that of the canonized Enlightenment *philosophes* ("perhaps above all!"). There are two separate questions to answer at this point: 1) Why is philosophy (as well as those disciplines that make use of the philosophical method of analysis) so limited, according to the novelists? And, 2) Why is the novel superior to philosophy (as well as other disciplines) as an instrument for understanding the intellectual, political, and cultural history of the West?

For many modernists, Darwin's findings and methods have both undermined and supplanted philosophy's dominant theory of knowledge, something that Huxley comically suggests in the "First Philosopher's Song," a poem from the 1920 volume *Leda*. Aware of his physical inferiority to the ape, the philosopher-narrator notes that humans can only assert their superiority with their "mind." Based on this logic, the more humans valorize the mind, the more they can justify their dominance over animals. Therefore, using the "Mind fabulous, mind sublime and free," the philosopher, who is "Greedy of luscious truth," wends his way "through the mangrove maze/ Of metaphysics," and thereby intellectually "Outruns the hare, outhops the goat." But since mind, instead of being a detached faculty of an objective knower, is actually just "a nimbler beast," Huxley implicitly exposes the philosopher's theory of mind as a Darwinian creation, a human-invented tool to ensure the survival of the fittest. In other words, the mind is not an ontological fact of being, but rather, it is

[16] Conrad (2001), *Under Western Eyes*. New York: The Modern Library: 275. Conrad's emphasis.
[17] Kundera (1988): 160.

an instrumental fiction that philosophers have constructed to secure power and dominion over brute beasts. To conclude the poem Huxley's narrator puts the philosopher in his rightful place:

> But oh, the sound of simian mirth!
> Mind, issued from the monkey's womb,
> Is still umbilical to earth,
> Earth its home and earth its tomb.[18]

The joke is ultimately on the philosopher, for whatever pretence he once had to superiority over animals, whatever belief he once held of the ascending ladder of Knowledge into a metaphysical Heaven of Ideas, the secular truth has now been revealed through the smirk of a mindful monkey.

Having exposed the philosopher's approach to knowledge as misguided and naive, many twentieth-century novelists subsequently turned against the philosophical approach to freedom, which Hannah Arendt intelligently defines in her 1961 essay titled "What is Freedom?" After doing a brief historical survey from the pre-Socratics to the mid-twentieth century, Arendt concludes:

> Our philosophical tradition is almost unanimous in holding that freedom begins where men have left the realm of political life inhabited by the many, and that it is not experienced in association with others but in intercourse with one's self—whether in the form of an inner dialogue which, since Socrates, we call thinking, or in a conflict within myself, the inner strife between what I would and what I do, whose murderous dialectics disclosed first to Paul and then to Augustine the equivocalities and impotence of the human heart.[19]

Philosophical freedom presupposes self-transparency and self-mastery, which enables the autonomous subject to make informed intellectual and/or moral judgments. This is not to

[18] Huxley (1920), "First Philosopher's Song," in *Leda*. New York: George H. Doran Company.
[19] Hannah Arendt (1993), "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin Books: 157.

say that philosophical freedom is without conflict. Arendt acknowledges that there are intellectual conflicts, as portrayed in Plato's dialogues, as well as moral conflicts, as depicted in the writings of Paul and Augustine. But she does suggest that the conflicts are epistemologically accessible to the philosophical subject. More specifically, the epistemic contents of the self are ultimately accessible to the individual's conscious and rational intellect, which is why the individual can act as a free agent.

In a 1935 essay ("The Menace to Freedom") that anachronistically reads as if it were a direct refutation of Arendt's "What is Freedom?" Forster explains why the philosophical concept of freedom is incoherent and even obsolete. When discussing the topics of freedom and solitude, Forster bewails the pathetic condition of the then-contemporary human. After making this claim, he then speculates how pathetic the contemporary human must appear specifically to philosophers, were philosophers still in existence:

> As things are, the poor creature presents a sorry spectacle to the philosopher—or, rather, he would do so if philosophers existed, but we have realized since the days of Voltaire and Rousseau that they do not exist. There is no such person as a philosopher; no one is detached; the observer, like the observed, is in chains.[20]

In this passage, Forster is not bemoaning a particular intellectual situation, which has for the moment assailed that otherwise "detached" band of perceivers known as the philosophers. Were this the case, philosophers would be able to shuffle off the mortal coils of interested knowledge, thereby recovering their "detached" epistemological bearings and their capacity to produce unbiased knowledge. Rather, for Forster, a shift in our understanding of knowledge has unseated the philosophers, rendering the axioms and methods of the discipline obsolete.

To explain why this is the case, Forster discusses history and psychology, two disciplines that have radically undermined the traditional theory of "detached" knowledge, given us a more

[20] Forster (1977), "The Menace to Freedom," in *Two Cheers for Democracy*. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace & Jovanovich: 10.

complicated understanding of freedom, and displaced philosophy on the socio-intellectual chain of being. What philosophers never really understood, according to Forster, is that the human is in epistemological bondage, shackled by the "ghosts of chains, the chains of ghosts." At this point, Forster does not mean the chains of the body or the mind, but the chains of history. Given their superficial understanding of history and psychology and their ahistorical approach to the world, many philosophers developed an extremely naive model of human and political freedom, one based on the belief "that a little energy and intelligence would" liberate humanity. We no longer accept such a model, Forster claims, because "[t]he twentieth century knows more history than that and more psychology."[21] In his essay, "What I Believe," Forster insightfully describes how psychology, in particular, has effectively deconstructed philosophy's self-enthroned ego:

> Psychology has split and shattered the idea of a "Person," and has shown that there is something incalculable in each of us, which may at any moment rise to the surface and destroy our normal balance. We don't know what we are like. We can't know what other people are like.[22]

This "something incalculable in each of us" is the subconscious, that indefinable and amorphous entity which is oftentimes epistemologically inaccessible to one's self but also that which frequently contradicts and/or undermines the rational ego's conception of self. And it is this subconscious something that the philosopher of Forster's age will not and cannot acknowledge or understand. As Sigmund Freud claims: "To most people who have been educated in philosophy the idea of anything psychical which is not also conscious is so inconceivable that it seems to them absurd and refutable simply by logic."[23] Specifically, the non-rational contents of the subconscious have no true existence for those educated in philosophy and are therefore not worth considering.

[21] Forster (1977): 10.

[22] Forster (1977), *Two Cheers for Democracy*. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace & Company: 68.

[23] Freud (1960), *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by James Strachey. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company: 3.

Given the radical distinctions between philosophers and novelists, Kundera concludes: "The novel's wisdom is different from that of philosophy."[24] Kundera's claim is not simply that both offer different but equally valuable insights. Actually, he argues that novelists put forth ideas that undermine contributions of numerous well-established intellectual professionals, including philosophers, for the art of the novel "undoes each night the tapestry that the theologians, philosophers, and learned men have woven the day before."[25] The problem with philosophical approaches to intellectual, political, and cultural history, Kundera asserts, is that "[p]hilosophy develops its thought in an abstract realm, without characters, without situations."[26]

Ironically, it is a contemporary philosopher who has produced one of the most searing indictments of philosophy. Charles Mills, a prominent race theorist, faults philosophy for privileging "the ideal abstract" over "historical reality"[27] in its analysis of the human and the world. To illustrate his point, Mills does a brief analysis of Descartes' radical interrogation of the philosophical Cogito, which gave birth to "modern philosophy" and its attendant intellectual dilemmas: "the challenges of skepticism, the danger of degeneration into solipsism, the idea of being enclosed in our own possibly unreliable perceptions, the question whether we can be certain other minds exist, the scenario of brains in a vat, and so forth."[28] Mills notes that these philosophical debates strike many blacks as extremely limited if not totally irrelevant, and the reason why is that the Western philosophical tradition has failed to understand the degree to which it has established a "relationship to the world that is founded on racial privilege," which has become "simply *the* relationship to the world."[29] For instance, Kant's theories about moral autonomy may be relevant to white Western males, but they have virtually no explanatory power for the situation of the enslaved blacks of Kant's day. Therefore, Mills draws a damning

[24] Kundera (1988): 160.
[25] Kundera (1988): 160.
[26] Kundera (1988): 29.
[27] Mills (1998), *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press: 7.
[28] Mills (1998): 8.
[29] Mills (1998): 10.

conclusion about Western philosophy: "The universalizing pretensions of Western philosophy, which by its very abstractness and distance from vulgar reality seemed to be all-inclusive of human experience, are thereby shown to be illusory."[30]

To shed more insightful light on human subjectivities, Mills invites readers to consider "Ralph Ellison's classic novel of the black experience, *Invisible Man*."[31] Instead of treating the experience of one abstract individual (the Cartesian subject) as universally applicable, Ellison's novel pictures the subjectivities of oppressors and oppressed, and given the situation of the oppressed, Cartesian questions regarding the reality of one's subjectivity are absurdly irrelevant, a mere "perk of social privilege."[32] Ellison's strength, according to Mills, is his ability to picture multiple subjectivities in relation to one another, the subjectivity of those who are considered full-fledged humans as well as those who are considered subhuman. In sum, there is a striking difference between philosophy and the novel. Taking the "ideal abstract" as universally applicable, "White (male) philosophy's confrontation of Man and Universe, or even Person and Universe, is really predicated on taking personhood for granted and thus excludes the differential experience of those who have ceaselessly had to fight to have their personhood recognized in the first place."[33] By focusing on vulgar and historical reality, the novelist skillfully pictures multiple subjects jockeying for personhood in relation to each other, which forces the novel *not* to take personhood for granted and thus enables novelists to understand and represent the very individuals that philosophers have ignored and/or overlooked.

Of course, it is important to note that Mills does not use Ellison's novel to debunk philosophy—he refers to his own work as "African-American philosophy."[34] But Mills' work does clarify and support Kundera's central claim that to get an accurate picture of the human-constructed world, we must begin with specific actions and particular situations rather than with abstract theories or bulky concepts. Therefore, any attempt to examine the ethos of

[30] Mills (1998): 9.
[31] Mills (1998): 8.
[32] Mills (1998): 8.
[33] Mills (1998): 9.
[34] Mills (1998): 9.

a particular age would be limited if it does not take into account the contributions of its most gifted novelists.[35] While Mills does not explicitly or formally adopt Kundera's view that the novel is superior to philosophy in articulating the spirit of an age, his method of analysis tacitly indicates that he considers this to be the case.

In the recent study *The Political Novel*, Stuart Scheingold intelligently clarifies the logic that leads writers such as Kundera to consider the novel superior to work from orher disciplines when it comes to defining a specific age. "Whereas social scientists and historians tend to gaze down from *above* on the twentieth century," Scheingold claims, political "novelists peer into the shattered lives, the moral dilemmas and the emotional chaos of the century—thus viewing a collective catastrophe through the everyday lives of victims, victimizers, temporizers, opportunists, true believers and those who simply averted their eyes." Given their capacity to imaginatively enter the inner lives of victims and perpetrators, political "novelists reveal, sometimes prophetically, the etiology and the aftermath of catastrophe."[36] Put differently, through their skillful depiction of the individual and the particular, political novelists disclose the complex inner workings of people, politics, and society.

While Forster would certainly agree with Scheingold's approach, he would claim that there is one other thing that makes the political novel totally different from and even superior to other approaches to intellectual and political history. As he argues in *Aspects of the Novel* (delivered as the Clark lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1927), the "philosopher" and the "scholar" are similar in that they "can contemplate the river of time."[37] The problem, however, is that they cannot contemplate that river "as a whole." Forster admits that both see "facts" and "personalities," and that they can "estimate the relations between" the facts and the personalities. But, ultimately, Forster concludes that both have "failed," and as a consequence, they have not contributed anything of substance to

[35] Kundera (1988): 162.
[36] Scheingold (2010), *The Political Novel: Re-Imagining the Twentieth Century*. London and New York: Continuum: 2.
[37] Forster (1955), *Aspects of the Novel*. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace & Company: 10.

the progression of the "human race."[38] Specifically, Forster targets Aristotle, who develops an aesthetic theory that focuses on a character's "'actions—what we do.'"[39] Such an approach Forster considers misguided and even flawed, which is why he claims "that Aristotle is wrong."[40]

In stark contrast to Aristotle's philosophical approach, Forster argues that the novel depicts the "secret life, which each of us leads privately and to which (in his characters) the novelist has access."[41] Indeed, the "specialty of the novel," according to Forster, "is that the writer can talk about his characters as well as through them or can arrange for us to listen when they talk to themselves. He has access to self-communings, and from that level he can descend even deeper and peer into the subconscious."[42] The novelist's most important contribution to an understanding of humans and culture is the ability to "show the subconscious short-circuiting straight into action."[43] It is hard to say exactly how Forster is using the word *short-circuiting* here, but it appears that the *OED*'s medical definition best applies, which is "to make a direct passage from (an organ) *into* some other part when the normal passage is obstructed." According to the logic of this definition, there is a direct passage from the subconscious to not the conscious intellect, but human action. This occurs, however, only when normal passage is obstructed. According to many twentieth-century novelists, philosophers have adopted the normal-passage model, which holds that action is the logical product of a conscious and/or rational choice. Forster would certainly acknowledge that the philosophical model does have some value when depicting human action, but he would insist that most human action and, more significantly, the most important human action can only be understood through a psychological model, which charts the subconscious short-circuiting into human action. Indeed, it is the reality of psychology's subconscious that has led Forster to claim that the traditional (philosophical) idea of a person has been split and shattered, for when "something

[38] Forster (1955): 10.
[39] Forster (1955): 83.
[40] Forster (1955): 83.
[41] Forster (1955): 83.
[42] Forster (1955): 84.
[43] Forster (1955): 84.

incalculable in each of us" rises to the surface, it inevitably destroys the rational subject's "normal balance."

Forster was certainly not the only twentieth-century novelist to become obsessed with the subconscious or the unconscious. Woolf credits Fyodor Dostoevsky for providing modernist writers with an aesthetic model that not only follows "the vivid streak of achieved thought," but also suggests "the dim and populous underworld of the mind's consciousness where desires and impulses are moving blindly beneath the sod."[44] This two-tiered model of character is the basis for Forster's iceberg theory of aesthetics, which focuses on the "shadowy and intractable," that which is "three-quarters hidden like an iceberg,"[45] and it is also the basis for Ernest Hemingway's iceberg theory of the novel, in which the skillful novelist produces a narrative that is like an iceberg, with one-eighth standing above water and seven-eighths remaining below. According to the logic of Hemingway's model, a capable writer has the capacity to "omit things," because he or she realizes that effective writing will instill within the reader "a feeling of those [submerged] things as strongly as though the writer had stated them."[46] In essence, novelists skillfully portray the mysterious and ambiguous life of the subconscious as it makes its way into human action. As the narrator in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* claims: "the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret places of life," which is defined as "the *passional* secret places of life."[47] Toni Morrison is more direct in *The Bluest Eye* when her narrator makes the following claim about a main character: "His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess."[48] For many twentieth-century novelists, to understand the nature of human action, one must have knowledge not only of an individual's conscious and rational conception of self and the world, but also the subconscious desires and ideologies, which oftentimes contradict what the individual

[44] Woolf (1987), "More Dostoevksy," in Andrew McNeillie ed. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume II: 1912–1918*. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 85.
[45] Forster (1955): 85.
[46] Hemingway (1960), *Death in the Afternoon*. New York: Scribner: 192.
[47] Lawrence (2006), *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications: 81. Lawrence's emphasis.
[48] Morrison (1993), *The Bluest Eye*. New York: A Plume Book: 150–1.

consciously and rationally understands him or herself to be. This unique ability to picture the subconscious puts the novelist in a privileged position as a social and cultural critic, which is one reason why Woolf felt qualified "to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense"[49] in her novel *The Hours*, which would eventually become *Mrs. Dalloway*.

At this point, let me briefly discuss Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in order to illuminate the way the subconscious short-circuits straight into action. Tomas is the novel's reckless philanderer, who consistently disappoints his insecure wife, Tereza, by sleeping with other women. Tereza cannot understand Tomas's insatiable need for other women, and for most of the novel, neither can Tomas. But in a dream, Tomas makes a crucial discovery, for he feels "unutterable bliss at the thought that he had [finally] found"[50] his ideal woman. Even though Tomas is married to Tereza, "[f]eminine calm had eluded him all his life,"[51] but in this woman of his dream, he has found what he has always been looking for. The moment, however, is cut short when he suddenly awakens. Dazed and unnerved, Tomas struggles to remember the name of the woman. To jar his memory, he tries to recall if he slept with her in Prague or in Switzerland, but to no avail. Finally, he realizes "that she inhabited his dream and nowhere else."[52] This brutal realization hits him with unimaginable force. His whole life, he has been in hot pursuit of a phantom of his subconscious:

> The woman in the dream, he thought, was unlike any he had ever met. The woman he felt he knew most intimately of all had turned out to be a woman he did not even know. And yet she was the one he had always longed for. If a personal paradise were ever to exist for him, then in that paradise he would have to live by her side. The woman from his dream was the "*Es muss sein!*" of his love.[53]

[49] Woolf (1980), in Anne Olivier Bell ed. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company: 2:248.
[50] Kundera (1999), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Translated by Michael Henry Heim. New York: Perennial Classics: 237.
[51] Kundera (1999): 238.
[52] Kundera (1999): 238.
[53] Kundera (1999): 238.

In a sense, the woman of his dream is his own personal "Platonic ideal of a woman,"[54] the philosophical Ideal he has been brainwashed into believing that exists, that will ultimately fulfill him, and that he knows most intimately and surely. Until he finds and marries this Ideal Woman, this soul mate, his life will be incomplete. Moreover, all other women are nothing more than pale imitations of this Ideal Woman, so Tomas feels no compunction for having betrayed or violated them.

Reflecting on his dream, Tomas finally realizes that he, the logical product of the philosophical West, has internalized, at the level of the subconscious, Aristophanes's soul-mate philosophy: "He suddenly recalled the famous myth from Plato's *Symposium*: People were hermaphrodites until God split them in two, and now all the halves wander the world over seeking one another. Love is the longing for the half of ourselves we have lost."[55] According to this myth, which is narrated by Aristophanes, each human can only become complete and whole when he or she finds his or her destined soul mate. Until the person locates the Ideal Other, life itself is incomplete and unfulfilled.

Having identified the degree to which this soul-mate myth has dictated his behavior, Tomas begins to critically interrogate the deadly consequences of his obsession with the Ideal Woman, and what he finally understands is that his subconscious belief in the Ideal has led him to overlook Tereza, a woman whom he deeply loves. To understand the nature of Tomas's conflict, let me quote a wonderful passage from Friedrich Nietzsche, who articulates one of the central ideas at the core of the twentieth-century novel. In *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche explains why humans can never actually experience self-transparency or individual authenticity: "all of us have, unconsciously, involuntarily in our bodies values, words, formulas, moralities of *opposite* descent—we are, physiologically considered, *false*."[56] There exist in our bodies words, values, formulas, and moralities that frequently conflict with our rational conception of ourselves. For instance, on a conscious

[54] Kundera (1999): 90.

[55] Kundera (1999): 238–9.

[56] Friedrich Nietzsche (1967), *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books: 192. Nietzsche's emphasis.

level, we might say to ourselves and others: I am not a racist. But at the level of the subconscious, many of us have absorbed and internalized certain racist words and values, which make many of us "racist" despite our intentions to the contrary. Given the way words, values, moralities, and formulas of opposite descent invade our bodies without our consent ("unconsciously, involuntarily"), it is impossible for us to be physiologically true. However, if we can identify some of the subconscious words and values that inhabit our bodies, we can become less false. Based on this view of the subconscious, novelists such as Forster, Woolf, and Kundera suggest that, to understand human action, it is more important to identify and define the subconscious values, words, moralities, and formulas than the conscious and rational views that people hold about themselves and the world. Indeed, they would go so far as to say that any attempt to explain human action that does not take into account the power of the subconscious to determine human action would be incomplete and even misleading, which is why most novelists would consider traditional analyses of culture and the political of limited value.

This two-tiered model of the human sheds considerable light on Tomas's treatment of Tereza. On a conscious level, Tomas loves Tereza and, therefore, has no desire to harm her. And yet, having internalized the myth of the Ideal Woman at the level of the subconscious, he behaves in a way that deeply wounds her. Tomas cannot explain why he consistently behaves this way, that is, until he identifies how the subconscious Ideal short-circuits straight into harmful action:

> He tried to picture himself living in an ideal world with the young woman from the dream. He sees Tereza walking past the open windows of their ideal house. She is alone and stops to look in at him with an infinitely sad expression in her eyes. He cannot withstand her glance. Again, he feels her pain in his own heart.[57]

In his dream world, Tomas is with his Ideal Other. But he clearly loves Tereza, which is why her pain afflicts him so profoundly.

[57] Kundera (1999): 239.

The problem is that he has allowed the soul-mate Ideal to dominate his subconscious "mind," which explains why he has never really seen Tereza or taken her pain so seriously before—Tereza's feelings, in relation to the more important Ideal of his "personal paradise," were ultimately not that important, so they could be sacrificed for the good of the more valuable Ideal. But now that he finally understands how the soul-mate philosophy is just the seething product of an overheated imagination that has dictated his behavior at the level of the subconscious, he can reject it. Not surprisingly, he remains faithful to Tereza after this dream. Moreover, he experiences "an ineffable love for"[58] her at this point.

As moving and insightful as Tomas's personal experience is, it is really a metaphor for something much larger. Within Kundera's novels, "characters fulfill not only their personal histories but also the suprapersonal history of the European experience."[59] Put differently, just as Tomas's subconscious belief in the Ideal has short-circuited straight into personal action that ultimately betrays and violates someone such as Tereza, so too does the larger political community's subconscious belief in the Ideal (whether that community is "Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Communist, Fascist, democratic, feminist, European, American, national, international"[60]) short-circuit straight into suprapersonal action that ultimately betrays and violates everyday people. Kundera's narrator makes this point powerfully by challenging the view that Communist leaders were criminals:

> Anyone who thinks that the Communist regimes of Central Europe are exclusively the work of criminals is overlooking a basic truth: the criminal regimes were made not by criminals but by enthusiasts convinced they had discovered the only road to paradise. They defended that road so valiantly that they were forced to execute many people. Later it became clear that there was no paradise, that the enthusiasts were therefore murderers.[61]

[58] Kundera (1999): 239.
[59] Kundera (1988): 40.
[60] Kundera (1999): 257.
[61] Kundera (1999): 176.

Like Tomas, Communist leaders are enthusiasts, believers in a subconscious Ideal. Tomas believes that there is one ideal person out there who would complete and fulfill him (lead him to "a personal paradise"), while the Communists believe that there is one ideal political system out there ("the only road to paradise") that would fulfill citizens of the body politic. However, once the Communists discover that their Ideal is just but a dream, "that there was no paradise," they have to face the fact that they did not execute criminals in the name of a righteous Ideal, but that they murdered people in the name of a phantom "ideal." The discovery that there is no Ideal forces them to retrospectively reinterpret their former behavior. In like manner, once Tomas discovers that his Ideal Woman is just but a dream, that no such Woman exists, he has to face the fact that he did not betray an insignificant nobody, but that he violated the trust of the woman he loves in pursuit of a non-existent Ideal. What is destroying the personal and suprapersonal lives of everyday people of the twentieth century is not a band of evil politicians, but a subconscious commitment to a phantom Ideal, an Ideal that functions to blind enthusiasts to the fact that they are violating and even killing others in pursuit of something that doesn't exist ("an ideal is by definition something that can never be found"[62]). For Kundera, only through a clear understanding of the way the subconscious Ideal short-circuits into criminal action can we put a stop to political madness, and it is the novelists, more than anyone else, who can expose how this process functions in all its intricacy and complexity.

Despite the novelists' superior ability to picture the subconscious and thereby illuminate the personal and suprapersonal basis of human action, there are some major aesthetic dangers and difficulties. As Alice Walker claims, great writers "are like musicians: at one with their cultures and their historical subconscious."[63] But as a novelist, it is important not to let politics dictate the content or form of the novel, as Walker claims to have learned from prominent Russian writers. Indeed, from Tolstoy she learned "the

[62] Kundera (1999): 201.
[63] Walker (1993), "Alice Walker: An Interview," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr and Kwame Anthony Appiah (eds), *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*. New York: Amistad: 337.

importance of diving through politics and social forecasts to dig into the essential spirit of individual persons—because otherwise, characters, no matter what political or current social issue they stand for, will not live."[64] The essential spirit of the individual character is more important than the political or social agenda. This explains Walker's frustration with protest literature, in which the "superficial becomes—for a time—the deepest reality, and replaces the still waters of the collective subconscious."[65] As a novelist, Walker insists that the most significant and profound realities are to be found in the historical and collective subconscious, which is why she favors a "book that exposes the *subconscious* of a people."[66] In essence, the novelist has the capacity to picture the deepest realities of the individual, which are located in the subconscious, and it is these realities, embodied in real characters and determinant of human action, that can best illuminate socio-political agendas.

Ellison provides an excellent way for understanding the novelists' two-tiered conception of character within a specific political context. At the conscious level, the American textual self is defined in terms of the God-given rights of human equality and personal freedom, which ensure that all citizens can pursue happiness. Indeed, the United States has been established in order to secure such rights, and "whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."[67] This textual representation of the American self is based on noble ideals. However, it is in deep conflict with the political reality of the United States, which limited the freedom of blacks, Indians, and women and treated them as inferiors from the time Thomas Jefferson defined the American ideals in the Declaration of Independence to the twentieth century. How were Americans able to maintain their ideal representation of themselves

[64] Walker (1993): 335.
[65] Walker (1993): 339.
[66] Walker (1993): 339. Walker's emphasis.
[67] Thomas Jefferson (2010), "The Declaration of Independence," in George McMichael and James S. Leonard (eds), *Concise Anthology of American Literature: Seventh Edition*. Boston: Longman: 282.

and their country while simultaneously violating on a daily basis those very ideals through their treatment of state-designated inferiors?

This is the central conflict of the American novel. As Ellison claims, the United States came into being when the founders "put down, upon what we now recognize as being quite sacred papers, their conception of the nation which they intended to establish."[68] But American novelists have struggled to come to terms with "the contradiction between these noble ideals and the actualities of our conduct,"[69] "between his acceptance of the sacred democratic belief that all men are created equal and his treatment of every tenth man as though he were not,"[70] and it is this conflict that has "generated a guilt, an unease of spirit, from the very beginning, and that the American novel at its best has always been concerned with this basic moral predicament."[71] Based on Ellison's approach, to understand America and Americans, we should focus not so much on the textual representations (Declaration of Independence) that Americans have of themselves, but on the subconscious ideologies that enable Americans to interpret and define their textual selves and country as they do, for it is the sub-textual definitions and interpretations that allow Americans to violate black people with psychological, political, and legal impunity.

The major claim of this book, therefore, is that the development and refinement of short-circuiting aesthetics has enabled twentieth-century novelists to produce uniquely insightful theories about the origins of the oppressive nation state. When I say short-circuiting aesthetics, let me be clear about the nature of my claim. My notion of aesthetics I take from Addison Gayle, Jr, author of *The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America* and editor of *The Black Aesthetic*. When examining the work of black writers, Gayle argues that the reader needs to think of the "writer as combatant" and "literature as a weapon in the struggle for human freedom."[72] The writers in this study, though not primarily

[68] Ellison (1995), *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage International: 163–4.
[69] Ellison (1995): 164.
[70] Ellison (1995): 28.
[71] Ellison (1995): 164.
[72] Gayle (1975), *The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press: xi.

concerned with issues related to the black community, are deeply concerned with political oppression, and they believe that the novel can play a crucial role not only in illuminating that which makes oppression possible, but also in preventing (writer as combatant) such oppression from occurring in the future, thereby creating the conditions for greater "human freedom." But they are also convinced that the traditional models for making systematic sense of human action have been seriously limited and even inaccurate, because they have failed to take into account the decisive role the subconscious plays in making oppression possible. Therefore, I foreground Forster's aesthetic model of the subconscious in this study, because I highly prize "how a novelist theorizes," as Kundera claims, for the novelist "holds jealously to his own language, flees learned jargon like the plague."[73] In my analysis, I will use the jargon-free language of each novelist, which poses some serious challenges, mainly because each writer has an idiosyncratic version of short-circuiting aesthetics. In other words, while I believe that Forster's aesthetic model of the subconscious short-circuiting into action applies in a general sense to all the novelists I discuss in this book, I also recognize that Conrad, Wright, Walker, Styron, David Mamet, and Louise Erdrich have radically different conceptions of the subconscious from Forster. Therefore, instead of providing a definition of the subconscious that applies to each novelist in this book, I will provide nuanced definitions in various chapters.

While I claim that the novelists have produced a more compelling model for making systematic sense of the origins of the oppressive modernist nation, it is important to note that I do not consider the novelists' models to be authoritative or final. After all, Kundera's suggestion that the Platonic Ideal inhabits the subconscious of many in the West, and thereby explains personal and suprapersonal acts of cruelty and violence, is as much a theory as Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's claim that "[t]hinking objectifies itself to become an auromatic, self-activating process."[74] But as I will demonstrate throughout this book, it is the novelists' attention

[73] Kundera (2007), *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts*. Translated by Linda Asher. New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney: Harper Perennial: 6.

[74] Adorno and Horkheimer (1988), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. New York: Continuum: 25.

to significant detail (rather than abstract theories) and the structures of the subconscious (rather than formal political policies and empirical events) that enables them to chart more clearly and accurately the conditions under which an oppressive regime such as National Socialism succeeded and even flourished. In essence, I am claiming that certain novels are every bit as much theories about the origins of the totalitarian nation as those contained in Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, Carl J. Friedrich's and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, and Pilippe Burrin's *Nazi Anti-Semitism: From Prejudice to the Holocaust*, but that the novelists' theories are more insightful, because the novelists have at their disposal more effective instruments to analyze and portray the subconscious structures of mind that translate into politically oppressive action.

Moreover, it is my contention that the twenrieth-century novelists' focus on the subconscious led them to reject the secularization hypothesis and to conceive of modernism in theological terms. This was the case because they understood that religion in the modern age functions most powerfully and effectively at the level of the subconscious. While most theorists accept the surface claim that the West has been secularized or is undergoing secularization, the novelists start their analysis by examining the words, values, moralities, and formulas that function at the level of the subconscious, and what they discovered is that theological assumptions and precepts play a significant role in the formation of the modernist subject. Therefore, they arrive at the same conclusion as the mid-twentieth century novelist, J. Saunders Redding, who claims: "God, of course, is an implicit assumption in the thought of our age. He is one of those beliefs so spontaneous and ineluctable and taken so much as a matter of course that they operate with great effectiveness (though generally on a level of subconsciousness) in our society."[75]

Let me briefly discuss Woolf's work to clarify this notion that the God-concept exerts overwhelming influence over people at the level of the subconscious. In the posthumously published short story "A

[75] Redding (1962), *On Being Negro in America*. Indianapolis and New York: Charter Books: 137–8.

Simple Melody," written in 1925, Woolf creates George Carslake, a character who mocks believers: "To believe in God indeed! When every rational power protested against the crazy and craven idiocy of such a saying!" Ironically, Carslake discovers that, despite his overt atheism, "he had been trapped into the words. 'To believe in God.'" As an atheist, Carslake specifically resents how he is trapped into belief through language. Whatever phrase he uses, however mundane, tinkles "in his ear with a sham religious flavour," for the religious, according to Carslake, colonize discourse, appropriating and then fashioning it to serve their ends: "'Getting home'," for example, "the religious had appropriated that. It meant going to Heaven."[76] The word "appropriated" suggests a verbal entrapment, a linguistic imperialism that coerces language users into adopting the theist's discourse whether they are aware of it or not.

Carslake was a trial run for the character of Mrs. Ramsay from Woolf's 1927 novel, *To the Lighthouse*. Like Carslake, Mrs. Ramsay experiences the colonizing impulse of religious discourse. In a weak moment, she says: "We are in the hands of the Lord." But immediately questioning the validity of such a claim, she observes that she has been "trapped" into belief: "Who had said it? Not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean."[77] Something inside her has compelled her to make a claim that she does not believe, so she searches "into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any lie."[78] The subtle but coercive discourse of belief entraps Mrs. Ramsay, and to liberate herself, she must probe her inner life and scrutinize the degree to which she has been *subjected* into being as a religious person. Once she identifies how the theist's "lie" has taken possession of her at the level of the subconscious, she can then begin the process of "purifying" herself.

Significantly, Woolf clearly indicates that Mr. Ramsay, who is not coincidentally a philosopher, is incapable of identifying the contents of the subconscious, and consequently, remains in thrall to its dictates. For instance, just after Mrs. Ramsay identifies the subconscious religious discourse and subsequently exorcises that

[76] Woolf (1989), "A Simple Melody" in Susan Dick ed. *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. New York: Harcourt Brace: 203.
[77] Woolf (1981), *To The Lighthouse*, New York: Harcourt Brace: 63.
[78] Woolf (1981): 63.

discourse from her mind, Mr. Ramsay enters the scene laughing to himself as he reflects on the philosopher David Hume, who had "grown enormously fat" and was "stuck in a bog."[79] This interjection would seem misplaced were the reader unaware of Mr. Ramsay's thoughts about the eighteenth-century philosopher, but consistent with the theme of being trapped into belief, Woolf's narrator informs the reader nine pages later what specifically causes Mr. Ramsay to laugh: an old woman rescued Hume from the bog "on condition he said the Lord's prayer."[80] Both Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay are confronted with situations in which a person is "trapped" into belief, but while Mrs. Ramsay uses the occasion to interrogate the way such knowledge has taken possession of her at the level of the subconscious and then to purge herself of this discourse, Mr. Ramsay dismisses the experience with a laugh. The implication, of course, is that Mr. Ramsay will, at the subconscious level, remain in thrall to religious discourse, while Mrs. Ramsay has liberated herself.

For Woolf, religious discourse is not just something that impacts the private realm, for in *Mrs. Dalloway* she examines the degree to which religion shapes England's political agenda. In the novel, Woolf documents England's dominant religious psychology through the character of Miss Kilman, who is driven by "God's will" and thinks of the world in terms of a "religious victory."[81] Kilman's actions might seem to be the overbearing gestures of a single fanatic, but Woolf's narrator clearly invites her reader to see Kilman as representative of a larger socio-political reality, when she notes the degree to which religious Conversion works in tandem with England's political objectives. As the narrator observes, Conversion is alive and well "in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own."[82] Woolf's point is not simply that religion is a powerful force within the culture; it is that England's political agenda

[79] Woolf (1981): 64.
[80] Woolf (1981): 73.
[81] Woolf (1981), *Mrs. Dalloway*. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace & Company: 125.
[82] Woolf (1981), 100.

presupposes a religiously committed citizenry, though its religiosity functions most forcefully at the level of the subconscious.

William Faulkner's *Light in August* usefully brings into sharp focus one of my main points about the modernist political novel. Although set in the United States, *Light in August* is nonetheless an excellent narrative for depicting the theological orientation of the Nazis, something that Faulkner confirms in 1957 when he refers to the character of Percy Grimm, who brutally murders Joe Christmas in the name of God and the state, as "a Nazi Storm Trooper." Significantly, Faulkner admits that he had not "heard of Hitler's Storm Troopers"[83] in 1932 when he wrote the novel. But this merely confirms my major point. Modernist political novelists were conscious of the mounting menace of totalitarianism, and it was a certain structure of the subconscious mind that made such a menace possible. What all of the writers in *The Modernist God State* have in common, therefore, is their attempt to depict the structures of the subconscious mind that made totalitarian action possible and even inevitable, which is why Faulkner claims that Grimm "exists everywhere." In other words, you can find Grimm "in all countries, in all people."[84] This tendency to universalize the structures of political oppression and violence is at the core of the novels in this study, but it is important to keep in mind that the novelists in *The Modernist God State* do not subscribe to traditional conceptions of the universal.

Like Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, who formulate their distinctive approaches to the universal in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, the novelists in this book "maintain that universality is not a static presumption, not an a priori given, and that it ought instead to be understood as a process or condition irreducible to any of its determinate modes of appearance."[85] Not all people are political oppressors. However, there are some discernible similarities between political oppressors from one country to the next, and the novelists I examine provide

[83] Faulkner (1958), in Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (eds), *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957–1958*. New York: Vintage Books: 41.

[84] Faulkner (1958): 41.

[85] Laclau (2000), "Introduction," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London and New York: Verso: 3.

a coherent way of understanding the universal conditions that make political oppression function. Such was the reason why Richard Wright's work underwent a radical transformation after he emigrated to France in the 1940s. As Paul Gilroy so insightfully argues, Wright's move to France, which marked a significant decline in his writing according to many scholars, actually broadened Wright's perspective and improved the quality of his writing and thinking. For Gilroy, if Wright's early writings focus on "the Negro as 'America's metaphor'"[86] of oppression, his later writings shift to the global and universal structures of oppression, which led Wright to make the following claim in a letter to the Prime Minister of India: "'The situation of oppressed people the world over is universally the same and their solidarity is essential, not only in opposing oppression but also in fighting for human progress.'"[87] Ellison, who was a friend of Wright's, qualifies the nature of the novelist's focus on the universal by saying: "The universal in the novel [...] is reached only through the depiction of the specific man in a specific circumstance."[88] In an interview about the American novel, Styron indicates his qualified support of the universal by saying, "if anything, the quality of the novel, it seems to me, in its depth and perception, and—to use a sort of tenuous word—universality, is greater now than it ever was."[89]

The novelists in *The Modernist God State* seek to understand and picture the universal conditions that made Hitler and the Nazis possible, but they also work vigorously to debunk those theories that ultimately distort our understanding of the root causes of twentieth-century political oppression. Note, for instance, how Wright brilliantly exposes the absurdity of laying the blame for twentieth-century totalitarianism on Marx and Nietzsche in his novel, *The Outsider*. In the novel, an American Communist and an American Fascist get into a vicious fight. Cross Damon, the

[86] Gilroy (1993), *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 149.

[87] Quoted in Gilroy (1993): 148.

[88] Ellison (1995), "The Art of Fiction: An Interview," in Maryemma Graham and Amritjit Singh (eds), *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi: 9.

[89] Quoted in Ralph Ellison (1995), "What's Wrong with the American Novel," in *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi: 39.

novel's protagonist, kills both men, but the police unwittingly rule that the Communist and Fascist killed each other. Later, when reading about the "DOUBLE TOTALITARIAN MURDER"[90] in the newspaper, Cross notices a caricature of the two men, which pictures them as drunken sex fiends who take sadistic pleasure in their blood bath. As a man obsessed with "'the psychological origins of tyranny,'"[91] Cross is furious, for this depiction of totalitarianism, he claims, "'is a kind of inverted pro-communist and pro-nazi propaganda. They've so distorted these men that no one could ever recognize their psychological types.'"[92] What irritates Cross even more are the theories being used to explain the men's behavior. As the newspaper article reports: "it was learned that these men's diseased brains had been poisoned by the dangerously esoteric doctrines of communal property advocated in the decadent writings of the notorious German author Karl Marx, and the Superman ideas sponsored by the syphilis-infected German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who died in an insane asylum. These two rowdy agitators, Gilbert Blount and Langlely Herndon, clashed bloodily in a quarrel regarding racial amalgamation theories and both died of their mutually inflicted wounds."[93] For Cross, such theories about totalitarianism do more than just distort; they actually make totalitarianism flourish, for "'[t]here couldn't be a better way of disguising totalitarian aims'"[94] than to depict people in such simplistic and misleading terms.

As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, Cross produces a two-tiered model of human action in order to illuminate the theological origins of twentieth-century totalitarianism, and central to his model is the conviction that the words, values, moralities, and formulas that inhabit our bodies at the level of the subconscious are a more potent determinant of human action than our rational and conscious formulations about ourselves. Therefore, the only way to get a semi-accurate picture of ourselves is through knowledge of our subconscious selves. Indeed, in an essay about his novel, *Native Son*, Wright clarifies his distinctive approach to the human

[90] Wright (1993), *The Outsider*. San Francisco: HarperCollins*Publishers*: 436.
[91] Wright (1993): 378.
[92] Wright (1993): 436–7.
[93] Wright (1993): 437.
[94] Wright (1993): 437.

and the state when he articulates his understanding of "the Fascist movement in Germany."[95] After doing extensive reading about Nazi Germany, Wright claims that he was struck with particular force by "the Nazi preoccupation with the construction of a society in which there would exist among all people (*German* people, of course!) *one* solidarity of ideals, *one* continuous circulation of fundamental beliefs, notions, and assumptions."[96] Wright goes on to qualify his claim by saying that he is "not now speaking of the popular idea of regimenting people's thought"[97] at a conscious and rational level. Rather, his focus is on "the implicit, almost unconscious, or pre-conscious, assumptions and ideals upon which whole nations and races act and live."[98] In essence, Wright realizes that the only way to make systematic sense of Hitler and the Nazis is to identify and understand the nation's and its people's sub-textual ideology rather than the nation's textual representations of itself and its people. To put this in Forster's terminology, it is the novelist who allows us to "peer into the [nation's and people's] subconscious," thus enabling us to see "the [state's] subconscious short-circuiting straight into [specific political] action."

It is the novelists' two-tiered conception of the human that explains why they consistently reject the secularization hypothesis. While standard theorists develop models based on the rational and conscious claims major intellectual figures make about the West and themselves, novelists develop models to peer into the subconscious, which oftentimes leads them to draw the opposite conclusion from canonized theorists. Implicitly, those who deploy a philosophical method of analysis hold that the most revealing truths about the human are to be discovered in the conscious and rational formulations that prominent intellectuals make about the world and themselves, while the novelists hold that the most revealing truths about the human are to be discovered in the words, values, formulas, and moralities that humans have subconsciously and involuntarily in their bodies. The aesthetic task for the novelists, therefore, is to picture and define those subconscious

[95] Wright (1998), "How 'Bigger' was Born," in *Native Son*. New York: Perennial Classics: 444.
[96] Wright (1998): 444–5. Wright's emphasis.
[97] Wright (1998): 445.
[98] Wright (1998): 445.

"realities," and they believe that they, above all others, can do exactly that.

Therefore, what distinguishes the novel approach to the origins of Hitler and the Nazis is the rejection of the secularization hypothesis, and it is the fact that the novelists start with the personal subconscious in order to illuminate the suprapersonal political that accounts for their conclusions. Put starkly, most scholars and theorists of secularization develop abstract theories about the separation of the church and the state, the shift in epistemic authority from the universal church to the individual conscience, or the way science and reason supplant religion and faith. They then impose those theories upon the culture in order to justify their claims that society is undergoing secularization or has already been secularized. By contrast, novelists consistently consider most people to be trapped into religious belief at the level of the subconscious, and they therefore conclude that the suprapersonal is ultimately religious. So a novelist such as James Baldwin claims that the major struggle for twentieth-century writers is to examine "the historical role of Christianity in the realm of power—that is, politics."[99] To be expected, Baldwin suggests that Christianity informed the Nazis' political agenda, which is why he claims that "the fact of the Third Reich alone makes obsolete forever any question of Christian superiority."[100] Aimé Césaire makes a similar claim when he calls for a study that would reveal to the "very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler *inhabits* him."[101] How different is Adorno's and Horkheimer's approach in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* when they reference the "historical neutralization of religion,"[102] a seemingly necessary development for Nazi ideology to flourish. Given this interpretation, when examining the Nazis' anti-Semitism, Adorno and Horkheimer rule out religion as a potential explanation: "The nationalist brand of anti-Semitism ignores religious considerations and asserts that the purity of the race and the nation is at stake. The nationalists realize that men

[99] Baldwin (1991), *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage Books: 45.
[100] Baldwin (1991): 52.
[101] Césaire (2000), *Discourse on Colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press: 36. Césaire's emphasis.
[102] Adorno and Horkheimer (1988): 166.

have long since ceased to bother about their eternal salvation."[103] But here is what Hitler claims in *Mein Kampf*: "the Jew cannot possess a religious institution," because "belief in a hereafter is absolutely foreign to him. And a religion in the Aryan sense cannot be imagined which lacks the conviction of survival after death in some form."[104]

Of course, it would be irresponsible of me to say that Baldwin and Césaire are right and Adorno and Horkheimer are wrong on the basis of this single example, but what I want to demonstrate is that novelists consistently offered a very different interpretation about the origins of twentieth-century totalitarianism from most canonized theorists, and they did so because they made use of radically different instruments of cultural analysis. My claim here does not imply that the work of canonized theorists is useless. Indeed, Wright and Styron explicitly use the findings of prominent theorists as they formulated their own views about Hitler and the Nazis. But as Lawrence suggests, novelists consider their theories most telling because they deploy an interdisciplinary approach as they chart the subconscious short-circuiting into action. Moreover, the evolution and refinement of the art of illuminating the subconscious enabled novelists to formulate a coherent theory about the origins of the totalitarian nation. The inability of intellectual professionals to understand that novelists are legitimate scholars in their own right, who have made incremental contributions to specific fields of study, has resulted in an unfortunate marginalization. As Kundera claims: "One of Europe's major failures is that it never understood the most European of the arts—the novel; neither its spirit, nor its great knowledge and discoveries, nor the autonomy of its history."[105] The reason why this marginalization has been so unfortunate, according to Kundera, is that the novel itself is the most effective instrument for combating totalitarianism: "The world of one single Truth and the relative, ambiguous world of the novel are molded of entirely different substances. Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate

[103] Adorno and Horkheimer (1988): 176.
[104] Hitler (1971), *Mein Kampf*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 306.
[105] Kundera (1988): 160.

what I would call the *spirit of the novel.*"[106] The world ignores the novel at its own peril.

There are three separate scholarly trends that have made it possihle for us to better understand and appreciate the contributions of novelists to an understanding of twentieth-century intellectual and political history, and specifically the origins of Hitler and the Nazis, which is why the ideas in this study are now possible and extremely relevant. First, this project is timely because scholars are finally starting to recognize the powerful role the subconscious plays in determining human behavior. Shaun Nichols's *Sentimental Rules: On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgment* (2007) and John Doris's *Lack of Character* (2002) are books written from the perspective of analytic philosophers and confirm what many novelists have been saying for nearly a hundred years about the power of the subconscious to determine human behavior. Indeed, one wonders if Conrad, Woolf, Forster, Huxley, and Lawrence would have been less critical of philosophy had they read Nichols and/or Doris, or even Butler, Derrida, and Žižek. Put simply, it is important to historicize the critique of philosophy in this book. More specifically, if we know the condition of philosophy when these novelists were writing and we know how they understood philosophy, then the novelists' uncharitable remarks about philosophy and philosophers should make much more sense. And yet, when we realize that the idea about the subconscious short-circuiting into action is only now being taken seriously because some analytic philosophers are starting to adopt it, one can better appreciate the novelists' frustration with philosophy and the philosophical method. It would not be an exaggeration to say that most novelists I discuss would claim that Nichols's and Doris's work is old news, which is not to minimize their contributions—their work is rigorous, insightful, and refreshing. It is just to say that there has been an internal prejudice within the intellectual community against the novelists (what novelists produce is entertainment, but certainly neither a valuable nor a noteworthy contribution to our understanding of something so complicated as the origins of Hitler and the Nazis) and in favor of philosophers and theorists (which is why they get credit for originating ideas that novelists have been

[106] Kundera (1988): 14. Kundera's emphasis.

articulating and refining for nearly a hundred years). But if some analytic philosophers today are prepared to admit that the subconscious plays a major role in determining human action, then we are now ready to take seriously the work of the novelists in *The Modernist God State.*

The second trend relates to secularization. William Connolly (1999), Vincent Pecora (2006), Tracy Fessenden (2007), Michael Allen Gillespie (2008), and Pericles Lewis (2010) have recently challenged the traditional secularization hypothesis, thus confirming Nietzsche's claim in *The Gay Science* that the God-concept and its attendant mentality will continue to haunt Western culture "for thousands of years,"[107] precisely because they will have their most active afterlife in the shadows of language, consciousness, and politics. Of the recent studies challenging the traditional secularization hypothesis, I find Gillespie's work to be the most insightful. Rejecting the idea "that modernity is in its origins and at its core atheistic, antireligious, or even agnostic," Gillespie rightly claims "that from the very beginning modernity sought not to eliminate religion but to support and develop a new view of religion and its place in human life, and that it did so not out of hostility to religion but in order to sustain certain religious beliefs."[108] To make his case, Gillespie develops an extremely sophisticated model of analysis that exposes how the West underwent a process not of secularization but of concealment, which has resulted in what Gillespie refers to as the concealed theology of late modernity.[109] The novelists I examine have a very different understanding from Gillespie of the concealed theological precepts within people and the political, because they have developed a specific theory about the subconscious, but Gillespie's impulse is identical to theirs.

Finally, this study is now only possible because of the recent scholarship focusing on religion and religious attitudes in Nazi Germany. In *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (1996), Doris Bergen does a superb analysis of the degree to which ordinary Germans considered their Christian faith

[107] Nietzsche (1990), *The Gay Science.* Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin: 167.
[108] Gillespie (2008), *The Theological Origins of Modernity.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press: xii.
[109] Gillespie (2008): 270–87.

to be consistent with National Socialism and thus explains why so many Christians supported Hitler and the Nazis. James Carroll has written an outstanding book, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (2001), which draws a clear line of connection between Christian theology and the Nazi pogroms against Jews, though he stops short of concluding that Hitler and/or the Nazis were Christian. But in the dauntingly well-researched and insightful book *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (2003), Richard Steigmann-Gall convincingly demonstrates that Hitler and many Nazis believed that "Christianity is at the center of Nazi social thought."[110] More recently, Susannah Heschel has published *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (2008), which examines the degree to which many in Germany treated "Nazism as the very fulfillment of Christianity."[111]

So let me state clearly and succinctly what I intend to argue. Many prominent twentieth-century novelists produced theories about the origins of the oppressive modernist nation. While it is not possible or even desirable to say that their novels are only theories about the origins and structures of political oppression, their works can be read as such theories nonetheless. Moreover, their novels as theories are extremely insightful and accurate, because they start with the personal subconscious in order to illuminate the mundane human world and the suprapersonal polity instead of starting with an abstract theory which is then imposed upon cultures and individuals. Following Kundera, therefore, I privilege and foreground in this study the autonomous history of the novel in its articulation of the origins of the modernist God state, and specifically the Holy Reich. Of course, I will have occasion to discuss standard theories, but since I define a *novel* tradition of interpretation, I let the novelists dictate the terms and frameworks in this study. Finally, since these novelists focus on the personal subconscious, which they suggest is religiously configured, they reject the view that secularization has occurred or even begun

[110] Steigmann-Gall (2003), *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 46.

[111] Heschel (2008), *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press: 17.

to occur. For the novelists in this study, what we witness in the twentieth century is not the emergence of the secular nation state, but the sacted imagined nation. *The Modernist God State*, therefore, will examine novels by Conrad, Forster, Wright, Styron, Walker, Erdrich, and Mamet in order to chart the formation of the sacred imagined nation as it took shape from the time of King Leopold II to Hitler. It would seem odd that a book that mentions the Nazis in its subtitle would only focus on National Socialism in the last two of its seven chapters. But there are two separate reasons why I do this. First, my objective is to demonstrate that there were major intellectual and political forces at work in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century that were of decisive importance in making the religio-political agenda of Hitler and the Nazis possible. The first five chapters identify and define those forces through an analysis of suitable novels. Second, rhe novelists I discuss have idiosyncratic strengrhs: Wright and Forster (Chapters 2 and 3) intelligently clarify how religion became extremely influential within the modern polity at the level of the subconscious; Erdrich, Walker, and Mamet (Chapter 4) examine how the rise of the sacred imagined nation worked in tandem with Christian supersessionist theology to justify the oppression and, sometimes, negation of Jews and non-whites; and Conrad (Chapter 5) provides a model for understanding how the subconscious short-circuits into genocidal action. These chapters set the stage for my analysis of Hitler and the Nazis (Chapter 6), and without them, my analysis of Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* (Chapter 7) would not make sense. But if all these novelists are right, then we would have to conclude that, had modernist Western culture not been deeply committed, at the level of the subconscious, to a religious conception of the self and the political, the Nazis' totalitarian horror show could not have occurred.